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# Introduction: Culture and Political Community (special issue "Arendt, Politics, and Culture")

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# Introduction: Culture and Political Community

Graham MacPhee

The first loss which the rightless suffered was . . . the loss of the entire social texture into which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distinct place in the world. (Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*)

In recent years the work of the political philosopher Hannah Arendt has been increasingly invoked by theorists and writers associated with or important to the disciplines of cultural and literary studies, from Giorgio Agamben to Julia Kristeva, and from Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak to Homi Bhabha (see Agamben 1998; Kristeva 2001; Butler and Spivak 2007; Bhabha 1994). The publication by Stanford University Press of a collected volume of Arendt's writing on literature and culture edited by Susannah Youngah Gottlieb confirms her increasing currency for those working in these fields (Arendt 2007a). But the range of Arendt's writing on literature and culture, and the centrality of narrative and performance to Arendt's politi-

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cal philosophy, both point to a more intricate and enmeshed relationship between the political and the cultural than may at first be evident. As I will argue in this introduction, and as the various contributors elaborate more fully in the essays that follow, Arendt's political philosophy is 'cultural' in profound and often unacknowledged ways. The contention of this special issue is that her political philosophy offers important insights and resources for contemporary criticism if understood in its own terms, rather than simply being regarded as a tractable source of conceptual terms or historical predicaments to be deployed within existing frameworks of cultural analysis and interpretation. This special issue, which as far as I am aware is the first such issue of an Anglophone journal in literary and cultural studies devoted entirely to Arendt, seeks instead to reflect on the process of intellectual passage or translation from political philosophy to literary and cultural studies. Following Walter Benjamin's conception of translation, this issue therefore takes seriously the nonidentity between the political and the cultural precisely in order to explore the possibilities for moving between them (see Benjamin 1996).

The profoundly cultural dimension of Arendt's political philosophy is perhaps most evident in the work that appears to have least to say about culture per se, namely Arendt's remarkably inventive but highly idiosyncratic study *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1973). Written in response to the social and political collapse of Continental Europe in World War II, the book adumbrates the constellation of historical vectors that could retrospectively be seen to converge in German National Socialism and the police regime of the USSR under Stalin: "[w]hat I did," Arendt writes, "was to discover the chief elements of totalitarianism and . . . trac[e] these elements back in history as far as I deemed proper and necessary" (1994, 402-03). As a result, the study constellates a range of elements that had appeared to existing political philosophy and historiography to have little to do with one another, and certainly not to have a causal relationship to the regimes she describes as totalitarian. It not only locates anti-Semitism, "race thinking," and "tribal nationalism" within this constellation, but also includes much more diffuse and wide-ranging historical shifts, such as the social atomization generated by capitalist modernity, the disintegration of class as a central political and social identity, imperialism, the intensification and extension of technological capabilities, and the incipient globalization of the nation-state form (1973, 158, 227). As Roy Tsao argues in an important reading of the text, what underpins this dizzying array of elements and provides a measure of cohesion (if not consistency or completeness) to Arendt's analysis is a submerged conception of "recognition" as providing the "social texture" or nexus through which political community is possible and within which it takes place (2004,

126–29; Arendt 1973, 293). I would argue that it is this largely implicit conception of *social texture as recognition* that engenders the profoundly ‘cultural’ dimension of her political philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

The consideration of political community remains largely implicit or submerged in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* because the book is primarily concerned with its disintegration in the middle of the twentieth century. However, Arendt’s conception of political community does emerge in outline in the second part of chapter nine, “The Perplexities of the Rights of Man,” where she focuses on the consequences of the abstraction of political rights from social experience in Enlightenment political philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Arendt argues that the Enlightenment’s focus on abstract and universal political rights fatally elides a crucial dimension of its own account (and indeed any other account) of political community, namely the shared experiential infrastructure of affective investment, habit, affiliation, legibility, meaningfulness, and value through which political recognition is possible. It is this historically variable infrastructure that she terms variously “social texture,” “a distinct place in the world,” “a common world,” or simply “home” (1973, 293, 296).

As Hegel had earlier demonstrated in *The Philosophy of Mind*, what appeared as rationally derived universal rights that existed, as it were, out there in the ether, were in fact the sedimentation or codification of historical acts of mutual (though not necessarily equal) recognition and misrecognition (1971, sections 430–39, 170–78; see also Beardsworth 1996: 70–96). In mutually recognizing one another we accord to the other in some measure the capacity to be like ourselves, an ascription of shared character which is ultimately the basis for political universality. But at the very same time, in so *recognizing* the other as something like ourselves, we *misrecognize* it by erasing its nonidentity or alterity. Although claiming to be simply “universal,” Arendt argues that political rights in fact emerge out of and operate within this patterning of recognition/misrecognition; they therefore depend on the contingent and relative parameters of cultural and social similarity and difference, as well as the historically changing schema of recognition (social norms and cultural values) that govern particular acts of recognition/misrecognition. Each act of recognition/misrecognition involves the interplay between different parameters of meaning and visibility, an interplay that attests to the social and cultural dimension inhering within political recognition. Thus, Arendt rearticulates Hegel’s concept of political recognition in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: what she calls “social texture” is the unacknowledged network of acts of recognition/misrecognition that constitutes a “distinct place in the world” and makes political community possible (Tsao 2004, 126–27).

Arendt’s conception of recognition emphasizes that it is simultaneously both a *political and juridical* act—it depends on the character of the political

constitution, the structuring of right, and the definition of political subjectivity—and a *social, economic, and cultural* act—it depends on *inter alia* relative economic and technological resources, social connection and proximity, differential protocols of private and public identity, cultural legibility, psychological consonance, isomorphisms of narrative and conceptual inheritance, and the readability of accumulated patterns of memory, judgment, aesthetic sensibility, and value. That is, when political rights—“which . . . were supposed to be independent of citizenship and nationality”—are understood in terms of recognition, they are revealed as always already engaged in the arbitrariness of historical experience, the specificity of social locatedness, the inequalities of economic endowment, and the particularity of cultural tradition and disposition (Arendt 1973, 293). What is conceptually novel about this formulation of social texture is that it is conceived as the *medium* through and in which political community takes place; it is neither a prior ‘ground’ or ‘base’ upon which the political would be raised as a “superstructure,” nor is it conceived as inert “matter” to be organized or formed by political ideality. That is, the political *inheres* within the historically variable experiential nexus of social texture, so that together social texture and the architecture of political right articulate the spatio-temporal conditions of possibility of political community.

The importance of registering the inherence of political right within social and cultural experience was demonstrated for Arendt by historical instances of the catastrophic failure of modern European politics. In nineteenth-century southern Africa, Arendt argues, indigenous people appeared to the Boer settlers as “behaving like part of nature” because their social and cultural world was not recognized within European parameters of apprehension: “They were, as it were, ‘natural’ human beings who lacked the specifically human character,” she writes, “so that when European men massacred them they somehow were not aware that they had committed murder” (1973, 192).<sup>3</sup> According to Arendt, the emergence of stateless people in twentieth-century Europe showed even more dramatically how political rights were dependent on and enmeshed within social texture, since populations who had at one moment been integrated into recognizable social and cultural networks where in the very next excluded from them: “Suddenly, there was no place on earth where migrants could go without the severest restraints, . . . no territory where they could found a new community of their own” (293). For Arendt, human embeddedness within “a place in the world” constitutes a regime of recognizability “which makes opinions significant and actions effective.” And it only within such a condition of recognizability—withstanding the elements of misrecognition, distortion, and suppression it necessarily involves—that the ascription of political rights (even if unequal

or oppressive) becomes possible. Conversely, “when belonging to the community into which one is born is no longer a matter of course and not belonging no longer a matter of choice,” the populations in question are rendered no longer recognizable and so become “rightless” (296). “The calamity of the rightless,” Arendt observes in a much-quoted passage,

is not that they are deprived of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, or of equality before the law and freedom of opinion—formulas that were designed to solve problems *within* political communities—but that they no longer belong to any political community whatsoever. Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them; not that they are oppressed but that nobody even wants to oppress them. (Arendt 1973, 295–96; emphasis in original)

That “no law exists for them” demonstrates that law requires or is itself dependent on a social and cultural matrix, which has here been liquidated. The universalistic language of rights, Arendt suggests, is already inhabited by a different conceptual register, by the language of sociality, historicity, cultural specificity, and particularity. But significantly Arendt responds to the failure of the Enlightenment language of rights not by rejecting it out of hand, but by twisting it back upon itself in order to identify a second order “right” which supplements and sustains it. This is what she terms the “right to have rights,” which “means to live in a framework where one is judged by one’s action and opinions,” or in which one’s action and opinions are (albeit differentially) recognizable (1973, 296–97).

The complexity of Arendt’s position emerges if we consider the central role played by the difficult and, as it were, amphibious category of “the nation” in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. The “nation” is in fact simultaneously both a political and cultural term: in the coupling “nation-state” it identifies the specificity of a historically new political form, but it does so by revealing the operative power of cultural processes of collective memory, narration, and identification within the political. This new mode of the inherence of the cultural in the political is in a sense productive: as Arendt observes (following Marx), the entry of broader populations outside of social elites into politics—and therefore the emergence of “class politics” itself—occurred at the moment “when peoples had acquired a consciousness of themselves as cultural and historical entities . . . whose future would depend on the course of a common civilization” (1973, 229). That is, both the universality of the Rights of Man and of socialism were already articulated through the medium of historically determinate and socially and culturally textured instantiations of ‘the people’ or ‘the working class.’

However, the configuration of the cultural and the political in the nation-state form also underpins the propensity of modern politics to vio-

lence, and gives rise to the political pathologies charted in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Because the Enlightenment failed to register the dependence of rights upon membership of the nation, it misrecognized them as “natural rights” that did not need to have special protection within the nation-state, or be embodied in institutional form beyond it. This failure left those not tied to a nation-state through ethnic or national belonging—a condition exemplified most fully by the European Jews—dangerously exposed. As Arendt explains, when “a person” is excluded from political community, they simultaneously “becom[e] a human being in general—without a profession, without a citizenship, without an opinion, without a deed to specify and differentiate himself—and *different* in general, representing nothing but his own absolutely unique individuality which, deprived of expression within and action upon a common world, loses all significance” (1973, 302). Simultaneously without socially recognizable features, yet embodying an abstract particularity that appeared to threaten the very universality which enables political recognition, Jewish populations were not simply misrecognized or subject to unequal treatment, but found themselves in a condition in which they were no longer recognizable as such. They lost not only the force of particular rights, but were placed in a position where they could eventually be “cu[t] off from the land of the living” (296).

As well as presaging disastrous consequences for those whom it excluded, the nation-state form also has significant consequences for “national” populations according to Arendt. The new significance of the cultural and social dimensions of the national over and against the political relationships of the state led to the atrophy of constitutionality and legality under the twin pressures of social atomization and class conflict, a tendency that would paradoxically push inexorably beyond the nation-state. In the case of established nation-states, the nation came to subordinate the legality of the state and transform it into a mechanism for imperialist expansion, generating “the most dangerous concept of nationalism, the idea of ‘national mission’” (1973, 182; see 185–221). In the case of populations denied nation-states, it became more and more important to “cling to their nationality all the more desperately,” since rights only accrued within the nation-state form. It was this second tendency which for Arendt marks the most ominous move beyond nationalism per se, for without the historical formulation of political community, such populations “could only point to themselves” as a value, which “meant, at best, their language” and “at worst, to their Slavic, German, or God-knows-what soul” (232). This exorbitant valorization of the givenness of abstract “culture” and “identity” is so frightening for Arendt because she sees it as destroying all possibility of recognition through the contiguity of social connection, cultural interaction, and the shared inhabitation of a “com-

mon world.” Just as, in her account, the Boers had come to see indigenous Africans as “‘natural’ human beings,” so the German and Slavic pan-national movements came to see *all* peoples—including themselves—in this way. That is, they saw all peoples as defined by the abstract givenness of their physiological inheritance or their accumulated cultural character and distinctiveness, rather than through their *actions* in a historical “common world” (192; see 231–43). For Arendt, since plurality arises from individuation through speaking and acting in the common world, then the reduction of peoples to their givenness—the perspective of “tribalism” and “racism”—marks the absolute abnegation of plurality and the destruction of the very possibility of recognition (301–302, 236). Combined with the “rootlessness” engendered by the social collapse of World War I, and the resentment against the legality and constitutionality of the state that accompanied it, this naturalization of human beings provided “very realistic, if very destructive, ways of escaping the predicament of common responsibility” (232, 236). For Arendt, the combination of the exclusion of the rightless from political community and the escape from responsibility by such pan-national movements opened up a road that led to the death camps.

I want to suggest that the relevance of Arendt’s writing lies in the proximity to and distance from contemporary Anglophone criticism of this conception of the inherence of the political within the texture of social experience. At first sight Arendt’s formulation may seem familiar enough: in identifying the inherence of the contingency and particularity of cultural instantiation within the abstract universality of right, her approach appears to bear out the contemporary concern for the dynamics of difference within the self-presence of identity and logocentrism, and therefore the rejection of universality associated with it. But while *The Origins of Totalitarianism* clearly describes a post-Heideggerian problematic, we miss the specificity of Arendt’s contribution if we reduce it to the terms of dominant theoretical paradigms. Crucially, Arendt does not simply “retreat to the aporia” of particular and universal, construing aporia as an endpoint upon which to base a deconstructive ethics; instead, she seeks to “*start thinking* with the aporia of judgment” (Caygill 1988, 19, my emphasis; see also 1989). As Roy Tsao observes, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* “the target of [Arendt’s] polemic is not the *possibility* of universal human rights” per se, but the blindness of this discourse of universalism to its inherence in the space and time of European modernity, even as that Europe came to dominate the rest of the globe (2004, 126; emphasis in original). Such a familiar but strange undertaking may prove suggestive, implying a remapping of theoretical coordinates that would mobilize together both Hegel and Heidegger, and invoke forms of holism (though not totality) and provisional philosophies of history (though not “the” philoso-



phy of history) that have been considered off limits to Anglophone criticism for a generation.

At a more immediate level, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* ascribes a profoundly political role to culture, while at the same time limiting the claims of culture to define absolutely the character and limits of the social and political. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt provides a powerful argument against attempts to excise culture from the weft and warp of spatio-temporal experience—as a “pure” textuality, for example—even if she seems to argue to the contrary elsewhere. But equally, as Mahmood Mamdani suggests, while acknowledging the politically vital role of identity, Arendt also points to the dangers of an abstract ‘identity politics’ that would seek to configure the political in terms of the disposition of self-prioritizing “culture” (Mamdani 2001, 19–20; see also MacPhee 2011). Finally, Arendt’s approach is striking in its (albeit still ethnocentric) acknowledgement of the role of imperialism in the constitution and fate of European political modernity: like Aimé Césaire, but unlike almost all other contemporary European accounts of the catastrophes of National Socialism and Stalinism, Arendt identifies the “boomerang effect” of imperialism as central to the emergence of totalitarianism in Europe and the genocides which it supervised (Césaire 2000, 36–41; Arendt 1973, 155; see also MacPhee and Poddar 2007, 9–15). Crucially, Arendt offers an account of the fate of European politics which is structurally constituted by globalization, rather than seeing the non-European as external: “this calamity arose not from any lack of civilization,” she observes, “but, on the contrary, . . . it could not be repaired because there was no longer any ‘uncivilized’ spot on the earth, because whether we like it or not we have really started to live in One World” (1973, 297). Yet where critical voices within postcolonial studies have warned against the tendency within globalization theory to marginalize the role of the nation-state, Arendt offers an approach which both registers the continuing (if changing) operability of the nation-state while also providing a critical framework for assessing its differential possibilities (see for example Behdad 2005).

However, if Arendt may offer insights and resources for contemporary criticism, her own perspective and the sometimes contradictory path described by her thought also offers more cautionary lessons, as a number of the contributions to this issue elaborate. The narrative presentation of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*—consonant with her aim, as Ronald Beiner puts it, to base political science “on *particulars* (stories, historical examples), not *universals*”—raises the problems associated with narrative viewpoint, irony, and the always partial nature of representation (Arendt 1992, 79). The turn offered by her next major work, *The Human Condition*, presents a different kind of problem (1989). In seeking to build a strong concept of the political

in the wake of the catastrophe she had analyzed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt appears to retreat from her own insight into the inherence of the political within the social, insisting instead on a sharp separation of “the political” and “the social” that has proven perplexing for even the most sympathetic of her subsequent interpreters (see for example Benhabib 2003, 138–41). Her report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann for *The New Yorker*, published subsequently as *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1977), generated enormous hostility and misunderstanding, although it raises important questions that are taken up by a number of contributors to this issue. Much less productive was her intervention in the American civil rights struggle in her essay “Reflections on Little Rock,” an essay that reveals the limits of her own narrative perspective in its relation to her adopted homeland, the United States, and its categories of race, limits that have significant ramifications for her entire political philosophy (Arendt 2003, 193–213). As well as looking to her for resources and insights, this special issue is also concerned with the contradictions and problems raised by Arendt’s authorship: indeed, it suggests that they may often be found together.

Howard Caygill’s essay, which considers Arendt’s reading of Kafka’s *Amerika* across a number of texts, provides an exemplary instance of this critical approach. Caygill places Arendt’s reading within the larger trajectory of her writing, especially her account of the “parvenu” and the “pariah” as formations of Jewish identity in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, the figuring of anti-Semitism and the concentration camp in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, and her conception of the democratic potential of the United States articulated in “Reflections on Little Rock.” Caygill opens up a space for rethinking these moments of Arendt’s authorship by reading Kafka’s text “against” her, developing a reading of the novel’s closing section “The Nature Theatre of Oklahoma” that offers a radically different vision of the United States and the political potential of Western liberal democracy. Implicitly the essay develops a sophisticated approach to the task of retrospectively reading Arendt’s work. Arendt’s thinking is shown to illuminate the political dimensions of Kafka’s fiction in a powerful and singular way; however, in plotting the narrative perspective that governs Arendt’s reading of Kafka’s text, Caygill points to the need to reinterpret these points of illumination in light of the (necessary) partiality and bias of her located viewpoint. As Caygill’s reading suggests, especially important for the contemporary reception of Arendt is an interrogation of her conception of the democratic potential of the United States, which fails to register adequately the historical significance of slavery, the legacy of race in organizing political space, and the implication of the United States in imperialism.

Patchen Markell's essay addresses one of the most perplexing aspects of Arendt's political thought, namely the apparently strict separation which Arendt makes in *The Human Condition* between a life-enmeshed "social" realm and a rarefied and contentless "political," a separation which in turn depends on the tripartite conceptual distinction between "labor," "work," and "action." In a strikingly original reinterpretation, Markell seeks to counter the dominant reading of the text by attending to the ways in which conceptual divisions are also connections—the joints that articulate *together* rather than simply separating, just as the boundary that encloses the household also displays the private within public space as "a distinct place in the world" (Arendt 1973, 293). The key 'joint' in his reading of Arendt's book is its consideration of the work of art, which for Markell suggests a different way of negotiating the passage from work to action, and therefore from the social to the political. This interpretation is itself enabled by a shift of focus to Arendt's own narrative role in *The Human Condition*. Markell argues that Arendt's concepts are not to be conceived as a Platonic architectural blueprint; rather, Arendt works on them actively within the text, refashioning and refabricating them as they are narrated in changing conceptual contexts.

Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb explores another sense in which questions of genre and representation might enlarge the reading of Arendt by considering the discussion of the judgment passed on Adolf Eichmann in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. While interest in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* has tended to focus on Arendt's dispute with Gershom Scholem over the meaning of her highly controversial formulation "the banality of evil," Young-ah Gottlieb seeks to enlarge the interpretative frame by examining the applicability of the categories of tragedy for judging Eichmann. Drawing on the little-known work of Yosal Rogat, whose pamphlet on the Eichmann trial is quoted at a pivotal moment in the closing stages of Arendt's report, Young-ah Gottlieb argues that the radicality of Arendt's assessment of the Nazi's "Final Solution," and of Eichmann's part in it, emerges in relief against the backdrop of the long tradition of tragedy. According to Young-ah Gottlieb, although Eichmann is far from being a tragic figure, his participation in the enormity of the Holocaust nonetheless invokes the categories of tragedy—not to ennoble his banality, but to gauge the irreparable tear in the fabric of Enlightenment jurisprudence enacted by the Holocaust, and to begin to calibrate the forms of international justice that might emerge in its wake.

Both Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin and Honaida Ghanim explore Arendt's anticipation of future possible conceptions of law, justice, and community by interrogating the significance of her thinking for the ongoing Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Zionism and the historical event of the State of Israel—or the *Nakba* (catastrophe) as experienced by Palestinians—remained

central concerns throughout Arendt's writing after her exile from Germany, concerns which entwine politics and culture in ways which go to the heart of her political project in illuminating but often uncomfortable ways. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin's essay provides a historically nuanced but profoundly contemporary reading of the recently published volume of Arendt's *The Jewish Writings*, carefully tracing Arendt's difficult relationship to Zionism through the political complex of bi-nationalism first elaborated by the Brit Shalom group (2007b). Raz-Krakotzkin argues that in her conception of bi-nationalism—conceived as the recognition of both Palestinian and Israeli national aspirations as inhering *together*—Arendt sought to combine her concern for the specificity of Jewish history and culture(s) with her broader critique of the nation-state and her demand for a framework of a legality beyond it. In rigorously examining Arendt's conception of bi-nationalism through the optic of postcolonial studies, Raz-Krakotzkin also traces the limits of Arendt's narrative perspective, and in particular the Orientalizing vision that restricted her understanding of the colonial character of the State of Israel—both in its characterization of the Mizrahi or “Oriental” Jews, and in its treatment of the Palestinians.

Honaida Ghanim's essay mobilizes the literary to engage with Arendt's political thought, and with the politics of Palestine/Israel, in an innovative and conceptually imaginative way. Taking Mahmoud Darwish's late poem “A Ready Scenario” as its starting point, Ghanim's essay seeks to develop Arendt's critique of Zionism within a contemporary context by way of a Benjaminian conception of temporality. The essay describes a convoluted but stalled temporality, which freezes the predicament of Occupation while enabling the process of settlement. Ghanim argues that this paradoxical temporal configuration of stasis/development conceals the operation of power while accelerating the colonial mechanisms of dispossession. Ghanim's essay is perhaps closest to Arendt in its performative dimension: just as Arendt uses historical narration in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to develop her fundamental political/philosophical concepts, so Ghanim's essay deploys a historical account of the dispossession of the *Nakba* (catastrophe) and the subsequent colonial subordination and control of Palestinian populations as a way of developing her account of the temporality of Occupation. The alternative she imagines connects in significant ways with the conception of bi-nationalism that Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin elaborates in his account of Arendt's critique of Zionism.

Christopher Lee provides a broader context for these two essays by considering Arendt's position within postcolonial thought. Lee considers the extent to which Arendt needs to be understood both as a progenitor of postcolonial studies and as a thinker whose work has come to be called on by sub-

sequent postcolonial critics. In the first case, his discussion centers on the role played by imperialism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*; in the second it surveys the widespread influence of Arendt's work on human rights and genocide for scholars addressing human rights abuses in the postcolonial world.

The essays by Allen Speight and Jakob Norberg each focus on Arendt's performative understanding of a particular aspect of the predicament of making meaning. Speight focuses on the way that Arendt both theorizes narrative and practices it within her own writing. The first part of this undertaking surveys her interpretation and appropriation of Aristotle, Hegel, and Augustine for her theorization of narrative. The second part focuses on her own narration in *Men in Dark Times*. In light of Julia Kristeva's comment that this text might be read as revelatory of her own character, Speight suggests that her practice may prove more recalcitrant and elusive than we might expect. Norberg focuses Arendt's diagnosis of modern culture in terms of crisis, whether in terms of a crisis of tradition, a crisis in authority, or a crisis in consensus. The essay teases out her complex sense of crisis as both enabling and destabilizing, and concludes by arguing that Arendt's return to Kantian judgment is designed to address the political consequences of modernity as crisis.

The essays by John McGowan and Graham MacPhee exemplify the dialogical spirit of this special issue by offering quite different conceptions of Arendt's politics as revealed through readings of contemporary novels. McGowan reads E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* alongside *The Human Condition* and a number of her later texts, and compares the conceptions of freedom and social justice operative in each case. For McGowan, Arendt comes close to existentialism in excluding social and economic concerns, providing a contentless freedom that does not substantively incorporate demands for social justice, which he argues are articulated in Doctorow's *Ragtime*. Yet having said this, McGowan contends that *Ragtime* lacks Arendt's conception of the political as a collective enterprise, and displaces its conception of production into an individualized conception of artistic composition. Focusing on the largely neglected account of narrative in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, MacPhee argues that it is misunderstood when read within contemporary paradigms of textuality, since it functions not in terms of referentiality but in terms of responsibility. Where postmodern textuality assumes a formal or contentless opposition between master and micro narratives, Arendt's conception of responsibility—and conversely, the escape from responsibility—is shown to allow for the historicity of narrative in ways that parallel Walter Benjamin's "The Storyteller." In rereading Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* against its interpretation as a postmodernist text, MacPhee argues that Arendt offers a way of engaging with the historically located character

of literary works beyond the sterile opposition of referentiality and a weightlessly ludic semiosis.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This account coincides in some respects with Patchen Markell's excellent book, *Bound by Recognition* (2003). My reading here stresses the speculative character of Hegelian recognition, and emphasizes the element of misrecognition always already involved in recognition (see Rose 1993). Markell articulates this speculative character as two distinct strands in Hegel's thinking, which he terms "recognition" and "acknowledgement" respectively (2003, 7).

<sup>2</sup> As Roy Tsao observes, this section is "confusing" because "it sometimes seems [that Arendt] is arguing against the possibility of human rights as such," whereas "the target of her polemic is not the *possibility* of universal human rights, but simply their supposed status as 'natural'" (2004, 126).

<sup>3</sup> Arendt does not mean to exonerate European settlers or lessen their responsibility for genocide, as her argument later makes clear (1973, 236). However, Arendt does appear to accept the racist assessment of African cultures as "natural," as "vegetat[ing]," and as being "without a history of their own" (1973, 192, 194).

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